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**INTEGRATION OF A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SHORT COURSE INTO
A ROADSIDE MARKETING CONFERENCE**

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Introduction

Handling administrative details, low enrollment and heterogeneous audiences plague efforts to conduct multi-county and statewide workshops on human resource management (HRM) for managers of farms and other small businesses. Time consuming administrative details include publicity, arrangement of facilities and meals, registration, cancellations and related problems. Among the important reasons for low enrollments are the non-traditional nature of the subject matter, perception that extension has nothing to offer in this non-production human relations area, the threatening nature of the subject matter, belief that only "large farms with many employees" can benefit from such material, and the mistaken assumption that nothing can be learned in such a meeting that is applicable in "my situation." Audiences are usually heterogeneous in terms of size of business, enterprises, experience in managing labor, mixture of family and hired labor, and need for human resource management versus human relations type subject matter.

This paper reports on a program delivery method that is a feasible alternative for addressing these three problems. By integrating a HRM short course into a well established and

successful roadside marketing conference, administrative problems for the HRM extension specialist were minimized. An acceptable enrollment was obtained and a homogeneous group of students assembled. The short course provided the specialist an almost ideal environment for six hours of HRM teaching.

Ohio Roadside Marketing Conference

The Ohio Roadside Marketing Conference has been held annually for 31 years. About 350 people from more than 20 states registered for the three-day 1991 conference. Fifty-five exhibitors participated in a trade show. The conference program included two general sessions, 15 presentations in concurrent sessions each 90 minutes long and two short courses. One short course was on a traditional roadside marketing topic, "Organizing Successful Fall Festivals." The HRM short course was a non-traditional topic for this conference.

Human Resource Management Short Course

Thirty-two people registered for the short course. Each registrant paid \$90 in addition to the \$25 conference registration fee. Participants in the short course attended four ninety minute sessions over two days. While they were in the short course, other conference registrants were attending four of fifteen available concurrent sessions. Participants in the short course attended the two general sessions and the trade show.

Participants joined other conference registrants for meals and refreshment breaks.

Publicity of the short course was made part of all publicity for the conference. The program signaled a specific change in approach to programming: "For thirty years, Ohio has held a roadside marketing conference which has been emulated around the world. We have always offered a variety of topics, mostly presented by successful market operators. Now we are ready to 'break out of the mold'."

Participants in the short course were mostly experienced labor managers. Most had been attending the roadside marketing conference for several years. All appeared highly interested in the topics covered in the short course.

Kelso Wessel, an extension specialist in direct marketing, generated the idea of integrating the short course into the conference, sold the idea to the conference advisory committee, and handled all administrative details. Bernard Erven, a HRM extension specialist, identified the topics for the short course, developed the participant notebook and did all the teaching. Ed Watkins, a retired extension specialist in marketing, reviewed the teaching plan, and introduced the short course and the instructor. He also convened each session, and conducted the short course evaluation.

The short course focused on recruitment, selection of personnel, and on-farm leadership. A planned fourth section on communication had to be omitted because enthusiastic participant

discussion took more time than planned. There was simply not time for the communication topic.

Teaching methods included mini-lectures on principles and concepts, group exercises and projects, case studies, and informal discussion by participants with the instructor and each other.

Each participant received a short course notebook and a book on situational leadership. The short course notebook included several HRM articles and outlines of the instructor's lecture notes.

All 32 registrants completed the short course. They could have dropped out of the short course at any time and gone to any of the concurrent sessions. At each of the four sessions, the short course was in competition with at least three concurrent sessions on specialized roadside marketing topics. Each registrant received a certificate of completion at the end of the short course.

Feedback

All participants completed an evaluation form. The overall evaluation of the short course was 4.81 on a scale of 5 = excellent; 1 = unsatisfactory. The overall evaluation of the instructor was 4.66. Five participant change items were included in the evaluation. The items and their mean scores on the evaluation were: knowledge improved (4.41), skill improved (4.32), attitude positive (4.53), interest increased (4.66),

confidence increased (4.53), and goals furthered (4.44). One hundred percent of the participants said they would advise others to take the short course.

The short course was planned as an in-depth treatment of HRM topics. However, both the formal and informal feedback suggested that several participants would like a second short course focused on just one of the topics covered this first time.

Lessons Learned

Two important needs came together in the integration of the HRM short course into the roadside marketing conference. First, a HRM extension specialist was looking for a way to overcome the administrative, enrollment and audience composition problems that had constrained his extension teaching. Second, the key planner of a long-standing conference was looking for an innovation that would enthuse the most experienced and knowledgeable participants in the conference. To conduct the short course piggyback on the conference was a solution to both problems.

It appears that the piggyback idea can be used in many other extension education situations. Many farm commodity groups and farm organizations have annual meetings into which short courses on specialized management or marketing topics could be incorporated.

Being able to devote full time to teaching makes best use of an extension specialist's time. Not having to use time for publicity, registration and arrangements of facilities is

attractive to teaching oriented extension specialists. An additional plus is risk minimization. Any risk of financial problems associated with low enrollment is passed on to the conference sponsors.

Regular participants in multi-day conferences are ready for a more in-depth treatment of some topics than is possible in 60-90 minute blocks of time. For people who have attended the same conference for 15 or more years, for example, there may well be a sense of little that is new on the program. Devoting all the educational meeting time to a single topic is a welcomed change of pace for these experienced people.

A short course format requires a teacher or a teaching team that can develop and hold the interest of participants. In the absence of high quality teaching, short course participants can easily drop out of the short-course and attend one of several other educational sessions that are available "down the hall."

Participants are willing to pay extra for a short course. They recognize that they get something more than regular conference content.

Certificates of completion are important to the participants. Tangible evidence of having completed a course conducted by a land-grant university is valued. Participants appreciate something to hang on a wall at home. To illustrate, one short course participant asked for a replacement certificate because the original had been lost or damaged.

A sense of special treatment of the short course participants is important. Special treatment can include limiting enrollment, short course notebooks, reference materials in the form of books and videos, an exceptionally nice meeting room arranged in a U shape to facilitate communication, name tags designating people as short course participants and certificates of short course completion.

Our one experience of integrating a short course into a multi-day conference supports the vigorous pursuit of opportunities to use this program delivery method with other subject matter and other conferences.